WORD EATER
Michael Ketcham 99.

Wordeater

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LA DESGRACIA DEL MUNDO

Crystal Duran

She carries an old denim Jordache bag with flannel underwear and wrinkled smelly dollarbills,
all that's left of the life she once lived

She turns around and walks on the dirt road to bid farewell to her past,
bury the dead and go on with her existence...to seek peace of mind

She walks in Jesus sandals across the rocks and dust
a piece of Mexico around her neck

A tablespoon of earth in a flask from her chile garden,
a cactus where her husband and one-year old baby lie

She's on her way to Texas where her Comadre awaits her
with guacamole and a bowl of steaming hot chile

SOUTHERN BELLE

Regan Bielby

Ruth is a Social Bulimic
We all know she waits
in the stall
after lunch
for one of us to come in.
Just so that she
can shove her hand
down her throat
and make those noises.
So she's the topic
of gossip
for a while.
As long as
her deterioration
is publicized,
she's happy.

THERE WAS A TIME

J. Labanowski

There was a time,
there was a place.
There was an us,
we had our space.

But that time is over,
the space is gone.
The place is now,
just hollow ground.

I thought about you today,
and how your arms used to hold me.
If I had one wish that could come true,
I would wish that we could still be.

But we had our time,
we had our place.
There's no more us,
and no more space.

Yes, that time is over,
the space is gone.
The place is now,
just hollow ground.

ZACK'S STOLEN JOURNAL WRITINGS

Erik Sowa

September 18th

A very long, mind-penetrating day is now closing and I'm hearing the swishing sound of cars less and less from the wet street below. I have been feeling quite alone in my random thoughts about deadlines for bills and ignorant folks. I see hundreds of faces each day at the toll booth; most of them are impatient and too preoccupied with getting to their destination to have the time to notice or exchange a word with the toll booth man.

It's amazing how often people do regard me as a machine; just a little man in a box, reaching out to take their money so they can be on their miserable way. Today during rush hour traffic, a worried looking man in a blue Camaro pulled up and said he didn't have any money on him to pay the toll with. Since he looked so worried, and there was a long line of cars behind him, I gave him a nod and opened the gate. Instead of thanking me, he just zoomed off leaving the all-too-familiar smell of car exhaust.

Sometimes, I get angry and sad in these daily situations when people treat me like I'm just a piece of furniture or a lamppost. Then, I will isolate myself from other humans and have nothing but the constant and sometimes agonizing conversations of my thoughts. Sometimes it's more comfortable to not be concerned about how others view me.

So, I play video games. Yesterday when I worked from five until three in the morning, I finished three crossword puzzles and I also got 250 lines in my Tetris game (even though I had to hit the pause button every five minutes to take someone's toll money).

September 20th

Early this morning, I woke up from a nightmare that kept evolving into different horrid scenes, and each scene was worse that the last. I remember swimming in a glowing red lake, and giant black ravens were hovering over my head. The ravens kept circling above my head in the dream, and I felt a deep fear. Suddenly, the dream changed abruptly, and I was in a large corridor with stone walls. In the hallways, there were mounds of tiny squirrels and insects. With every step I took in the hallway, I was crushing these creatures with my bare feet, and I felt helplessly terrified.

Waking up from that dream felt like having a vicious hangover. My head hurt and my mouth was dry. I couldn't believe that those visions in my dream were coming from my mind, and I couldn't erase those visions from my thoughts. Is it death anxiety, or maybe repressed anger, which created those nightmares? I don't know.

Later on I went riding on my bicycle. I was pedaling through the trees, with the bees, and the breeze. The sun glimmered through the leaves. I rode down to my meditation pond that I like to call Soothsayer's Serenity. There, I caught a frog, then watched him plop out of my hands and into the water. Just then, while noticing the water's reflection, I saw a black raven. Looking up, I was startled to see it fly over me and into the trees, like in my dream. But, the raven glided, and the sunlight brought out the gray color of his beak. It was a beautiful raven, and I didn't feel so scared or confused at that moment.

THROUGH THE CREAM SILK CURTAINS APPEARS THE SADNESS OF THE DAY

Anna Justyna Strzelczyk

Through the cream silk curtains appears the sadness of the day.
Lips stuck together,
eyes looking at the outside.
Fishbowl, fishbowl, I live in a fishbowl.

Shined leather shoes,
knee-length skirt,
angora cardigan.
Piano, gold plates, grandma's vase, and people who fuss.
Fishbowl, fishbowl, I live in a fishbowl.

Through the crinkled polyester curtains appears the sadness of the day.
Sighs too quiet for anyone to hear.
Forehead up against a cold window.
Fishbowl, fishbowl, I live in a fishbowl.

Dirty Adidas sneakers,
torn jeans,
gray sweatshirt.
Wooden table, plastic forks, ceramic Santa, and people who avoid.
Fishbowl, fishbowl, I live in a fishbowl.

YOU HAVE REACHED A POINT

Steve Siedler

You have reached a point in your life where you believe you know something. You believe you have something to offer, but nobody will take you up on it. You have thrown caution to the wind, believed in yourself when no one else did, and learned from your mistakes. You have survived broken bones, broken promises, and a broken heart. The world has shoved your face in manure, and you have chewed it up and spit it right back out. The only problem is that all you seem to be left with is a losing lottery ticket and an unacquired taste for excrement.

You have bucked the odds and started over. You have taken on all comers in a game rigged by the house. You have carried yourself with pride and dignity, though your clothes were torn and your face bloodied. You have seen God, walked with angels, faced down your devil and lived to walk away. You have brought a smile to more than one face. You have every right to feel proud of yourself, but with all your struggles and journeys, it is blatantly apparent that you are still right were you started, and even staying there takes everything that you've got. The most notable face not smiling is yours.

You believe in yourself and the people around you more than half the time. You have ruled out brain surgery and data entry as a lifelong goal. You achieve the blind staggers less than once a month. You have rejected more original ideas than your computer will ever have. You have lost your temper at a retail clerk and regretted it. Your face will never grace the cover of People Magazine, but you don't read it. Your favorite car has been totaled, and your insurance company let you buy a 1987 Hundai. Remakes of old songs make you nostalgic and nauseous at the same time. You have revised your dreams and found yourself exactly where you swore you never would be, the same place as everyone else.

Life is not a timed event, though you never take your watch off. An old picture is the only thing that reminds you of people you would have died for, or murdered. You cry at movies that used to make you laugh, and laugh at movies that used to make you cry. You plan your most noble aspirations in the shower. You read your horoscope, telling everyone you don't believe in astrology. You wonder where the last five years have gone, though you were present every second. You have forgiven almost as many people as have forgiven you, though you have lost track of the number. You give presents at Christmas whether you want to or not. You are surprised by who remembers your birthday and who does not, and at times you mistake your own age.

You have lost pieces of yourself that you would like to have back, though you are better than you were. Time has given you perspective, but you wish you didn't know so much. You lose your train of thought and find that no one has noticed. You do things you said you never would, and vow to quit things you never will. You took a wrong turn and blamed someone else, even though you were driving. You hate the Hokey Pokey. Once a week you pretend you are a singer. Your closet is full, but you can't find anything to wear.

You know you are a survivor, just not certain why. You've asked for a purpose but been told the person in charge of that department has been terminated. You've been informed your lifetime replacement warranty has expired, and that company policy dictates no exceptions. You make enough money but don't have any. One day a month, you can change the world; three days a month you'd like to blow it up. Work is measured in years, pleasure in moments, and though you never sell yourself short, you frequently settle for less, just like everyone else.

You are puzzled when people who have their lives together ask you for advice. The death of your dog affects you, but the death of your cousin does not. You have asked people how they were, hoping they would not tell you. You have been courteous to strangers and cruel to the love of your life. You are wary of someone who says he admires you. You have been praised for an accomplishment that meant nothing to you, and laughed at for one you were most proud of. Skills have become more important than beliefs. You wish that life lasted forever, but can't wait to get to the end of the day. Your biggest financial arrangements pay off after you're dead.

Your past has occurred in the blink of an eye. Your future is still far away. You have believed in the wrong people, or no one at all. You have believed in yourself, just not at the right times. Your biggest challenge is finding a challenge, and you become bored just at the verge of greatness. The sum total of your accomplishments is read to a group of people more interested in your bottom line, and the birds chirping outside don't care at all. Keeping busy is easily mistaken for achievement. If Only has replaced What If.

While you can count your friends on one hand and your truly meaningful contributions on less than that, and your failure to keep pace with your neighbors has been well documented, you may find solace in the revelation that the most positive aspects of your life may well be accented by the most negative word in the English language. Acceptance rarely accompanies fulfillment. Humming a tune is not the same as singing the song. The impossible dream may in fact be a dream, but impossible? To answer, invoke that most negative word, an emphatic NO. Further clarification will not be necessary. I will believe you, unlike every one else.

SONNET 2

Alicia Tooley

A winter cloud takes your form above me
Your picture painted brings my face to smile
I remember how you used to hold me closely
And devour that pleasant moment for a while.

The pleasure of your touch is much desired
As I proclaim my love in the naked air
I recall how your heart recently expired
From that love we had that only dreamers dare.

I ball myself up like a newborn infant
And scream into my hands empty and cold
As the wind sings a haunting church-like chant
And sadness infects my body like the common cold.

And I lie there in the showy grass till darkness
When the sky puts on her jet black evening dress.

FATHER

Nikki Sherdan

Father, do not crumble
Your children can not entirely mature
A childhood obliterated, abolished memories left to tumble

Rapid heartbeat and clammy hands, my soul initiates a rumble
I beg you give me all that is required to nurture
Father, do not crumble

Drunken beast, your speech is mumbled
The devil captured your heart. Father is there no cure?
A childhood obliterated, abolished memories left to tumble

Three grown, but none fully assembled
Two wives with good intentions and affectionate hearts, but fragile bodies tortured
Father, do not crumble!

Laugh, father. Do be humble
Deceive them, father. Behind closed doors, you fail to uphold your stature
A childhood obliterated, abolished memories left to tumble

Father above, I beg you, take your child. His dues are payable
Ah, I am set free for your soul at rest is pure
Father, do not crumble
A childhood obliterated, abolished memories left to tumble

THE MOST SHALLOW AND BITTER TEARS

Natalie Mau

The most shallow and bitter tears are the ones shed upon the realization that you are fantastically mediocre. Trapped in limbo between infancy and adulthood, the best years already expired and the grim reality of being "all grown up" just ahead. You are raised to be the greatest, your playground days spent dreaming selfish little dreams, greedily smiling to yourself because you're going to be somebody. Suddenly the graduation gown falls away and you take your first real look at yourself. And though you're happy in a painted-smile-way, you know you haven't sparkled once in your life and that you never will. You'll be OK, you're smart. Most people like you. You'll go to college where you'll be just as smart as everyone else, you'll fall in love with someone just as perfectly non-sparkly as yourself, and you'll get a job in a cardboard box. You'll work 50 or so mediocre years and then you'll retire to Florida where millions of other nothings before you have flocked and died. Being the best is a nonsense notion; there has never been anyone any better or worse than you. We just keep improving ourselves into beautiful blah. Our goals set higher, our pockets fatter. Eventually the bitter tears will stop coming as our souls shrivel and fall away. It's happening so fast I can't even think of a good way to end this poem.

I WISH I KNEW WHY

Shirley Kiaunis

Bob – 1953 to December 1999

An attractive man
He was only 40 and 6
Talked a lot about his two kids
And his lovely wife too

Worked two jobs
To care for his family
We may never know
Why he put the gun to his head
Three weeks before Christmas

AHH...WHATEVER

Corey Ducci

Ideal life: Love, Marriage, Kids, Money, Family Bliss (in no particular order).
What more could one ask for?
Let's face it, life for most people isn't an episode of The Brady Bunch.
I have always been told that "Life isn't perfect," "One can never predict the future," and "Things don't always go as planned."
It seems two people meet,
they fall in love,
they take a chance with marriage, have kids, begin a family,
but then, sometimes, things fall apart.
The kids grow up.
In raising them, the two people forget the detail of keeping the romance alive.
What is next...Divorce?
Trust, friendship, and respect gained over the years of marriage
tossed out the window.
And who is left to pick up the pieces?

SPAM

Candy Perry

When Grandma died, the uncles found baby food jars filled with quarters stashed all over the house. Her favorite hiding places were the open portions of the wall. The closet in her bedroom had never been completely plastered and in the gaps left between the wall studs were made-to-order hiding places. Also found were crumpled dollar bills in the toes of long stored shoes that hadn't been worn since Grandpa died twenty years earlier. Found in Grandpa's cherished fire chief's uniform that hung in state behind a yellowing garment bag were savings bonds of up to $100 denominations. Grandma must have trusted in the U.S. government more than she did in banks. Whenever she paid for an item in the store, she would open her pocketbook just enough to slide out a bill of the lowest denomination that she needed, guarding her money like a gambler with a winning poker hand.

"I will never eat Spam" was a surprise comment made by Grandma while she and I were washing and drying the china in preparation for Easter dinner that was to be served the next day. I, as the oldest grandchild, was given the honor of staying all night at Grandma's and assisting her with the preparations for holiday dinners. Our chores included washing the precious china. An extra to helping with chores was getting to spend time alone with Grandma. The remark about Spam stunned me, the woman who thought nothing of cooking beef tongue and passing it off as roast beef, who could relish head cheese with the specks of white and black mystery meat, this same woman wouldn't eat innocent, pink, rubber Spam? Why Spam was a dinner regular at home: my mother would decorate the oblong with cloves and try to pass it off as ham. We had it fried with eggs and doused with some sort of coagulated white sauce on toast. Or was that chipped beef? My mother was the master of specialty meats.

I thought my Grandma was the female version of God. The fiery Old Testament version of God who spouted hellfire and damnation. Not the forgiving Father of Jesus. She seemed quiet and submissive around her husband and the pastor, but I had seen her in action with my dad and the uncles and her daughters-in-law and my cousins. They all knew better than to try to change her mind when she "assumed the position" as my dad called it. "The position" was standing straight, chin up, with a stubborn look of self-righteousness, both arms in the teapot position, elbows bent with clenched fists on her hips. She was solid in body and mind and no one with any shred of sense would have crossed her at these times. My dad also called this "getting her German up." I alone seemed to be immune. Maybe it was because we were

so much alike. But our views were different on food and my curiosity was aroused. I asked, "Why won't you eat Spam, Grandma? I like it."

She took one look at me, softened visibly and answered, " I had to beg for it."

"Like a beggar Grandma? On your knees Grandma?" I had often seen my Grandma in prayer, begging for God's forgiveness, as she called it. I couldn't imagine my Grandma begging from anyone else. We didn't often have these kinds of talks and I couldn't wait for her to explain. She said I was the only person on earth that ever listened to her. Just listened, didn't try to contradict, assign meanings, explain the ways of other lesser humans, just listened.

It was during the Depression, she explained. "I had just had Aunt Sis and had to quit the job at Woolworth's. Your Grandpa was working laying the roads."

We had driven over my Grandpa's roads often. They were the side streets of our small town and many others like it. The roads were constructed of red brick, each brick laid by hand. It was a WPA project. According to Grandma, working on the WPA meant being off the dole and that seemed to be an important point of pride. I often asked Dad to explain the fine points of Grandma's stories, hating to interrupt her once she got started. Dad explained that the WPA was a way that the government had of putting people to work during the Depression and making sure that the people who wanted to work could get a paycheck. He went on to explain that the dole was like welfare and was only for lazy people.

Drying her hands off with the ever-present dishtowel, my Grandma brought two cups of tea to the kitchen table. She sweetened my tea for me and sat down. Sitting meant this was going to be a story of some length as opposed to the over-the-shoulder stories she told while ironing or washing laundry. I loved these together times; she was going to give me her full attention. Her house was so often full of my cousins and extended family that these very private moments were rare. And for me to have her full attention was even more rare. I settled with my honeyed tea and gave her back my full attention.

"It started when we lost the farm." Her eyes were sad. "Grandpa and I had rented the farm even before we were married. We used to tend to our chores at home and then go work on our own place. In those days everyone helped. Your Grandpa's brothers let us use his mule for the plowing. The first year we got married we had a good harvest and Uncle Clary was born. But we never had any money. Any money we ever made went for rent or back into seed. I went years wearing the same two dresses, one for work and one for church. And had two more babies. There were times when I was so tired that all I could do after a day of work was wash my face and fall asleep. And your Grandpa worked just as hard. But hard work wasn't enough.

One year we couldn't make the rent. And a lot of other people who rented or owed the bank were in the same boat. We hated to do it, but we had to move where there was work."

"You came to Chicago then?" I knew the answer but I wanted her to know that I was still listening.

"We lived with my cousin for a while before we found work. I hated the city; it was dirty, and people were mean. There were taverns everywhere, and your Grandpa was so mad all the time. He hated to accept any sort of help that we couldn't repay. Then he found the WPA job and we moved out here. I didn't get away from the taverns, but we did get our own place. Your Grandpa never wanted to pay rent again, so he worked nights building other people's houses and built this house with what was leftover."

I remember Grandpa cussing when he had to change the storm windows — each window was a different size and shape. This story was getting off track; I had heard these parts before.

"What about the Spam, Grandma?" I tried to get her back on track. This tactic was a little dangerous with Grandma: some times she just shut up and quit talking altogether, but I was feeling brave. All the chores we had set out to do were done. Grandpa wasn't due home for a while, and Grandma looked settled in to the story.

"I hated every bite of that meat I had to take." It had worked! "There was a truck that traveled down the streets with food. It wasn't the best of food, cans of meat that everyone calls Spam now, turnips, potatoes, onions, but it would fill up hungry bellies. We all called it the "dole" truck. And everyone on our street ate off of it at one time or another. Some of the men couldn't get any work and wouldn't be seen near it, but their wives had to feed them somehow. I hated to have to eat off that thing too. But sometimes Grandpa worked out of town, and the WPA check wasn't enough, and the children were hungry. So we took charity." The last sentence was uttered with anger and disgust. "You had to go up to the truck and the driver would look up each person's name on a list. The driver would make a big deal out of saying your name out loud. He liked to make us feel bad. It was the same as begging. I could never do it while Grandpa was home. He would go hungry before he would take anything from anyone."

My grandfather's pride was legendary. About the only time I heard my dad take the Lord's name in vain was about Grandpa. But instead of Dad calling Grandpa prideful, he would just describe him as stubborn. "He's like a goddamn jackass. Gets an idea into that hard German head of his and digs his heels into the dirt like a stubborn old mule and won't listen. Won't accept help or advice or anything from anyone." But the funny thing about this was that while Dad was making this state-

ment, he was "taking the position." He looked like his mother and acted like his dad at the same time. He could have been describing and complaining about himself. And he told me I was just like Grandma!

Grandma was swirling the dregs of her tea. The shame of that memory played around her face like a shadow. She looked up from her tea and surveyed her immaculate small house. She seemed to take stock of what had happened then and how things were now. In the refrigerator was a huge ham, and Grandpa was bringing home a fresh turkey after work. Earlier that day, we had made coffee cake, pie and her lamb cake was frosted and ready for the jelly bean garnish. Tomorrow, we would peel and mash at least ten pounds of potatoes, candy five pounds of yams and break out quarts of pickled beets, green beans, and homemade watermelon pickles from her stash of hundreds in the root cellar-like basement.

At the dinner table, set with the gleaming china, Grandma would hover over all of us, refilling our plates, worrying that we were sick and not eating enough to keep a bird alive. Or she would say the Grandma trademark statement that she knew her cooking wasn't that good and that was why no one was eating. She knew we were just being polite and taking small helpings, so we wouldn't hurt her feelings. That was the trigger, and we all would gorge ourselves to make Grandma feel good and still only have made a dent in the cornucopia of food that would be presented. The uncles would groan in contentment and flop in the easy chairs to "let their dinner settle," and the snores would soon follow. Even we kids would be loggy with overeating.

It was then that Grandma would "take the position" and smile. No pink beggar meat for her family. She was a success.

SEEKING AFTER THE LEFT HAND

Erica Gallagher

I breakup
with myself
seven times a day
for no other reason
but that I'm getting bored of me.
Someday we'll be back together.
I just know it.

PEANUT M&M

Susan Irvine

Lots of people I know
are like M & M's
Sugary, candy-coated niceness
disguising a total nut.

ALONE

Brian Wrobel

Today I ate my lunch in the park and something finally hit me. I am alone in the world. For about two hours, I sat in the shade of a grand oak tree watching couples walk by, hand-in-hand. As I was watching this, I thought why do I have to be alone? Why am I to suffer, to watch other people be happy with each other, while I sit here in emotional pain? All of these were good questions. Why did I have to suffer? Why was I the one watching people be happy? Why wasn't I the one being happy? I should be out on the town, meeting new people. I should be one half of those couples I saw walking, laughing, and talking to the one I love.

I know why I'm not part of that. For one, I'm too shy. I can't approach anyone, even to borrow something. It's an awful way to live. Imagine trying to start a conversation with someone, then have a sudden bolt of fear strike you in the heart, and you turn away as soon as you can. That is how I feel everyday when I try to approach someone. It would be nice if someone could approach me and start up a conversation with me. Then again, she would probably see how boring and dull I am and walk away. Another reason why I think I don't have a significant other is my fear of rejection. I truly believe that no one in the world will accept me. I tell myself that this is silly. Someone has to accept me, everybody has friends. Then I go out to a bar or a club, I imagine myself talking to someone, and then I see her laughing at me. I see her telling me that I am a loser and to get away from her.

I think everyone feels like this every now and then. Maybe this is just a phase I am going through. This could just be some adolescent thing that I still need to get over. Yeah, tomorrow I'll go back to the park, find a single woman and start talking to her. What am I saying? That will never work. She'll just look at me strangely and walk away. Why would anyone want a complete stranger to come up to her and start talking? Besides, having a girlfriend must be awful. Why would I want one? First of all, I'd have to spend all my time with her, which I don't have time for. Then I would have to spend all my money on her. I would have to take her out to eat, concerts, or movies. Plus, I don't make that kind of money to be taking her out all the time. Also,

I'd have to talk to her everyday, every hour, every minute! But, sometimes it can be good to have someone to talk to. Someone to be there when you need her, to talk to, to hold. I guess having a girlfriend wouldn't be that bad, but a wife? — that'd be the worst. You have all the baggage of a girlfriend and you get more. You have to be with this woman till the day you die. You can get a divorce, but that can result in a big mess, and that would be worse than marriage. You also might have kids when you marry. Kids are nothing but money-hungry, rent-free-staying, coming-and-going monkeys on caffeine pills! Then again, it would be nice to have a boy to pass on the family name. Watch him hit his first homerun, go to prom, go to college. I guess it wouldn't be that bad. I could get used to it. That settles it. Tomorrow I am going to talk to a woman that I don't know. Then I am going to ask her to dinner and a movie. But, what if she doesn't like me?

THINKING

E. McGrath

"don't" he said "don't" but I will. and I will see you. you are so beautiful as you stand before me slowly stripping yourself of yesterday and i try to reach out but i can't toss your head back and enjoy the sky walk silly around the parking lot don't get lost trying to find your car i do dream of tomorrow forget mediocrity lose yourself in someone else as i – this time last year it is fall now this is now i am remembering a streetlamp that he held me under and i needed him but he wouldn't let me come close pain love i admit i am a little confused what is on your mind why won't you tell me you have to see me in all of my colors, in all that i am believe touch these days are dead leaves this time will kill us as long as we have shadows and i will hold you tell you i need you and you will say "don't" squeezing his hand until it hurts hurts shut my eyes and stare at the black ask yourself if you know how to feel anymore if you remember and i here small distance between us through love this year i have thought of you somewhere in the back of my mind every once in a sweet while...why. And one night after small pieces of you had returned one by one over time over again while kissing someone else and one night i see you and it all makes sense i am so taken by you understand that you burn burn burn you remind me of my precious kerouac baby "don't" it was once in a while i thought of you it was over time again time...why

SWEET MUSIC
Eric Yankee

Jacob pulled up to his favorite bar and got out of his 1978 Pinto. Lately, his life was not going so great and he felt like he needed to get seriously drunk.

As he entered the bar, Jacob noticed that he was one of few people there. The bartender was behind the counter scrubbing glasses. A young woman was sitting at a table by herself in the corner of the bar. An old man was sitting at the bar rambling to the bartender. The old man was at least 70 something, with long, stringy white hair. He was clutching a bottle of Jose Cuervo in one hand and held a cigar in the other. There was an old acoustic guitar leaning against the bar next to the old man. Even though he was old, he looked as though he was not someone to mess with. Jacob sat down next to him and ordered a shot of vodka.

"Vodka, eh?" said the old man. "Drink some of this. It'll put some hair on your balls!" said the old man as he passed the bottle of Jose Cuervo to Jacob.

"No thanks," Jacob said as he slammed his shot of vodka.

The old man began to study Jacob carefully. He studied him with dark and steely brown eyes that looked as if they had seen the world. Jacob shifted uncomfortably and made sure not to meet the old man's gaze.

"What's wrong, son? No, don't tell me...I think I know. Women trouble, right?" said the old man with a laugh. "I have a good sense of these things," he snorted.

"No, not women."

"Not women? When I was young, I used to have a passion for chasing women. As I grew older, I stopped."

Jacob ordered himself a Budweiser. He carefully popped the top of it off and took a swig. "Why'd ya stop chasing women?" Jacob asked between swigs.

"They started chasing me!" laughed the old man.

"Oh. Do they still chase you?" said Jacob sarcastically.

"What kind of a question is that, boy?"

"I was just wondering if you're still a lady killer in your old age."

Jacob smiled to himself and took another drink. The old man was definitely an odd one. The old man slammed his tequila bottle on the counter top. He glared at Jacob for a moment, and then his mouth curved up in a sly smile.

"I know what your problem is. You don't got passion for nothing! You gotta have passion, boy!" the old man snorted at Jacob.

"What the hell are you talking about, old man?" asked Jacob

"Passion! That's what I'm talking about!" shouted the old man. The bartender glanced in Jacob's direction as if to say, "He gets this way sometimes...pay no attention to him."

"Yes, sir. All my life, I've had a passion for music. It moves my soul and helps me get through my day," continued the old man. "What kind of passion do you have?" he said as he glared in Jacob's direction.

"I've always wanted to act," said Jacob as he stared at his beer.

"Always wanted to, eh? Why the hell don't you just do it?" inquired the old man.

"It's pretty tough. I don't seem to have much luck getting roles, " sighed Jacob.

"Tough! Ha! I worked as a professional musician for years, but it took a lot of work to get there."

"A professional musician, eh?" smiled Jacob.

"Yes, a true professional. I cared more about the music than the money. The money was good to though," said the old man as he pulled out his wallet and opened it up for Jacob to see.

Jacob looked in and noticed several hundred-dollar bills. He made a mental note that the old man was insane and continued drinking his beer.

"Working as a musician is tough, but if you truly love something, you'll do it no matter how hard it may seem," said the old man with a smile on his lips. "If you really want to act, you'll do it instead of sitting here at a bar feeling sorry for yourself," he snorted.

Jacob was starting to get irritated by the old man. Who was this guy to tell him how to live his life? Jacob knew all about working hard for something that you loved. No matter how hard he tried though, nothing seemed to work out for him. He was ready to give up. Jacob slammed down the rest of his beer and stood up.

"I don't quite know who you think you are, old man, but you don't have a right to tell me how to live my life," said Jacob grimly.

"What do you mean? I'm not trying to tell you how to live your life. I'm just offering you some advice. Take it or leave it," the old man said.

"You're sitting here at this bar, telling me about passion. I have passion, old man. I don't need to hear about it from you," said Jacob in a low growl.

"Maybe you don't have enough of it. If you truly did, you'd take my advice. Give up everything you've got now and go act. You'll be a lot better off," said the old man as he drank the remaining tequila.

"You want the worm?" smiled the old man.

"No, thanks."

"This worm is a lot like you. He just wants to get out of this bottle; you just want to act. If both of you could do what you wanted, you'd both be happier."

"Now you're comparing me to a worm. You're out of your mind, old man," growled Jacob as he stormed out of the bar and sped away in his Pinto.

After a few minutes of silence, the old man ate the tequila worm and smiled to himself. He knew that even though he had angered the young man, at least he had told him what he needed to hear. Without true passion for what you love, you'll have a hard time trying to get anywhere in life. The old man looked over at his acoustic guitar which had been leaning against the bar. It had a well-played look to it. He picked it up and caressed each string lovingly and began to play, and the sounds of sweet music filled the air.

LINES COMPOSED...

Diane Carsten

As I sit on the doorstep of yesterday contemplating the realities of tomorrow
I'm reminded that the past is just that and the future best be left to the storytellers.
Live for today, it's what we are now that determines our tomorrows.

Is it destiny, is it fate, is it written in some great book of life, that who we are,
what we will become is a play already written
just waiting to be acted out?

Like lab rats we scurry around in a giant maze hoping to find the cheese.
Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we don't.
But, are we expected to win or are we programmed to lose?
Is the story written in pen or pencil?

EVERYTHING CAUSES CANCER

Kurt C. Krzystofiak

Cancer causes lab rats
Lab rats cause cancer
Frat brats cause rent
Rent causes cancer
Lab rats cause frat brats
Rats cause frats
Cancer causes society
Doctors cause cancer
Doctors cure cancer
Society cures Ren
Ren + Stimpy cause insanity
Cancer cures rats
Rats cure insanity
Frat brats cause college
College causes Dain Bramage
Brain damage causes frat labs
Frat labs cause doctors
Ren causes doctors
Radon causes cancer
Radon causes lab rats, frat brats, and Ren + Stimpy
Stimpy is a cat
Radon causes cats
Cats cause cancer
Cats eat lab rats
Cats eat radon
Cats eat frat brats
Cats sure do eat a lot
Cats cause world hunger
World hunger causes cancer
Cancer causes artists
Artists cure world hunger
Artists kill cats
Artists save lab rats
Artists save radon
Artists don't like frat brats

Artists kill frat brats
Cops throw artists in jail
Cops save cats and frat brats
Cops cause cancer
Cops cause jail
Jail causes cancer
Cops cause world hunger
Musicians like artists
Musicians kill cops
Musicians cure world hunger
Artists get pissed
Artists kill musicians, cops, cats and frat brats
Cops kill musicians, artists, lab rats and radon
Musicians kill cops, artists, frat brats and Ferraris
Radon kills cops
Ferraris do absolutely nothing
Cats eat everyone
Cats die
Radon wins

FRESH INK
Heather Colby

I wasn't very shocked when I got the call from Brian. "Hey, if you want a tattoo, come over to my house," he said. Hmmm. I had wanted a tattoo for a while, but I was eighteen and three years away from the legal age. So when Brian's parents bought him a tattooing set for his twentieth birthday, complete with gun, ink, needles, and skull patterns, I was ready. It didn't matter that I would be the third person that he had ever tattooed (second, not including himself) because it was free! He wasn't charging me one penny, and that sounded good to me. I grabbed a CD from my collection to show Brian what I wanted permanently inked on my skin, and I was off.

Twenty minutes later, I found myself lying on my stomach on Brian's bed. My shirt was pulled up halfway, revealing a smooth back that would soon be marked forever. I closed my eyes as Brian drew the outline on my skin with a black pen. He held the CD with one hand, the pen with the other as he copied the image that graced the cover of the Selecter CD that I had brought along. The ink felt cold, yet soothing, almost as if it was trying to prepare me for the pain to come. When he was done drawing, Brian told me to look at my back in the mirror to make sure it looked okay. I got off of the bed, went into the bathroom, and was pleased with what I saw. On my skin was a drawing of a man, often called the "rude boy" or "2 Tone guy," which was a symbol for 2 tone, the British ska movement in the late 70's (and the record label of the same name). I smiled to myself, took a deep breath, and walked back into Brian's room.

I sat backwards on a folding chair, with my arms and head resting uncomfortably on the back of the chair. My shirt was tucked into my bra strap (Brian was my friend, but I was not about to strip for him), and I waited for him to start. A few minutes later, I heard a noise that would soon be etched into my brain forever – the buzzing of the tattoo gun, hungry for human contact. The first time I felt the needle was a shock. It was hard for me to sit still, but soon I became accustomed to the needle poking repeatedly in my back and the pain it brought.

Brian worked on my tattoo for two hours, with a short break in there somewhere. The longer he inked, the more it hurt. It wasn't the kind of pain that made me want to cry. Instead, it was the kind of pain that made me close my eyes, grit my teeth, and dig my nails into my skin. The closer the needle got to my spine, the more I wanted to turn around and punch Brian in the head (which for a non-violet person

like me signifies something important). I asked Brian over and over if he was almost done, and his answer was always the same: "Yes!" which I knew really meant no.

Brian's mom came in to see how it was coming along. I asked her if the tattoo looked good, and she said that it did. After listening to Brian say "Oops, sorry!" a few times, her answer put my nerves at ease. But the minutes were starting to feel like days. We listened to album after album, Propagandi, Bad Religion, 7 Seconds, each of which I thought would be the last. Finally, Brian said that he was almost done, and this time he meant it. This came as a huge relief to me, because I wasn't sure how much more of this I could take.

Then, I heard the sound I had been waiting hours for. Silence! No more buzzing! It was over! Brian took a step back to admire his work. He then sprayed some solution on my back, wiping away a swirling combination of excess ink and bright red blood. Once again he told me to look into the mirror. I stood up, which was nice in itself, and braced myself for what I was about to see. Inside the bathroom, I was reluctant to look at my back. What if I didn't like it? Maybe I should have waited until I was older! Was Brian's mom lying when she said it looked good? Ahhhh!!

I then did the only thing I could – I turned around and looked at my new tattoo. And there he was, the 2 tone guy with his suit and pork pie hat, staring back at me. My tattoo looked beautiful! I studied it from all of the angles that I could, and wished that my head could do a 180 degree turn so that I could get a better look. Wow! I had just marked a significant portion of the right side of my back for life, and I was absolutely delighted!

I ran back into Brian's room and gave him a huge hug, making sure that he didn't touch my fresh ink. He made me sit down in the folding chair once more, this time to bandage me up. Being the professional he was, Brian tore a bunch of paper towels off of a roll to create a makeshift bandage. To make the towels stick, he attached them to my back with stickers advertising his friend's auto parts store. Like I said, he was a professional. I was finally free to go, and so I left, taking with me much more than I came with – a new tattoo, an increased tolerance for pain, and a smile that (I swear) stretched from ear to ear.

SEINFIELD: "THE AUTOMATIC CALLBACK"
Erin Hunter

Int. Jerry's Apartment

Jerry and George

Jerry: So, how did that date go with Carol?

George: Carol? Yesterday? I don't want to talk about it.

Jerry: Oh come on. It couldn't have been *that* bad.

George: Well, I can't see her again. Okay? Let's just leave it at that.

Jerry: What did you do?

George: Look, I told you I don't want to talk about it.

Jerry: Okay, okay.

He waves his hands in the air in an "I surrender" gesture. Kramer enters.

Jerry: Oh, hey Kramer.

Kramer: Hey, Jerry. Hey, George.

He heads to Jerry's refrigerator, rummaging around inside.

Say, Jerry, would you happen to have any...Never mind! Found some!

Kramer leaves the apartment carrying three apples. George gives him a bewildered look. Jerry shrugs as if he's used to Kramer's eccentric behavior.

George: Aren't you going to ask him what those are for?

Jerry: Quite honestly, I don't even want to know.

After several moments.

George: So, did you find out about those reservations yet?

Jerry: No. Should I call?

George: Call! Yes, call!

Jerry picks up the phone and punches in a few numbers.

Jerry: Busy! The nerve...

He hangs up the phone.

George: What about that automatic callback thing?

Jerry: I don't know. Never used it. You ever used it?

George: Never used it.

Jerry: Never used it. Should I use it?

George: Use it!

Jerry hits the redial button and waits several moments. He pushes another button and hangs up the phone.

George: So now what?

Jerry: It said to just wait for it to call us back.

George: That's it? It calls us back?

Jerry: That's it.

George: So we just wait?

Jerry: We just wait.

Buzzer

Jerry: Yeah?

Elaine: It's Elaine

Jerry: Come on up.

George sits at the table. Jerry stands near the door. They're both staring at the phone. Elaine enters.

Elaine: Hey, guys.

Jerry and George: Hey.

Elaine: What are you two doing?

George: Waiting for a phone call

Elaine shrugs and shakes her head. She places her purse and coat on the couch.

Elaine: So, George, how'd that date go with Carol yesterday?

George makes a quiet whimpering noise.

Jerry: He doesn't want to talk about it.

Elaine: Oh, it couldn't have been *that* bad!

Hitting George on the arm.

So when are you going out with her next?

George: (To Elaine) Stop! Just stop! (To the telephone) Why don't you just ring already?!

Elaine: (To Jerry) What's with him?

The phone rings; Jerry is saved.

Jerry: Hello?

Telephone dub over:

Recorded Operator Voice: The circuit was available but it is busy now. Please hang up.

Jerry: What the...?

George: What was that?

Elaine: Who are you trying to call?

Jerry: I'm checking about reservations for tomorrow night's show at the club. The phone just told me to hang up!

The phone rings again.

Jerry: Hello?

Recorded Operator Voice: The circuit was available but it is busy now. Please hang up.

Jerry hanging up the phone.

Jerry: This is ridiculous!

George: Again?!

Elaine: Why do you keep hanging up?

George: He decided to try the automatic callback.

Jerry: (Muttering) Stupid technology!

The phone rings. Jerry picks it up.

Recorded Operator Voice: The circuit was available but it is busy now. Please hang up.

Jerry: (Yelling comically) I don't want to hang up! I want to get through!

The recording is heard again. Elaine takes the phone from Jerry and hangs it up. Several seconds pass in silence. The phone rings again.

Jerry: I'm not answering it!

George answers the phone.

Recorded Operator Voice: The circuit was available but it is busy now. Please hang up.

With a puzzled look, George hangs up the phone. Several seconds pass. The phone rings again; this is the fifth call. George, Jerry, and Elaine all stare at it. No one moves. Finally after several rings, Elaine answers it.

Recorded Operator Voice: The circuit was available but it is busy now. Please hang up.

Elaine: (In a frustrated tone) This is nuts! Whose idea was this?

Several seconds pass. The phone rings; call number six. No one answers.

Jerry: (YELLING) Make it stop! Make it stop!

The phone continues ringing.

Elaine: (YELLING OVER THE PHONE) Why don't you just call the operator and cancel it?

George, covering his ears.

George: (YELLING) Cancel it! Yes, cancel it!

Jerry, answering the phone. He receives the same recorded message. Hanging up, he quickly dials "0." Operator's voice dubbed over:

Operator: Operator. How may I assist you?

Jerry: I want to cancel the automatic callback. It's driving me nuts!

Operator: Please hold while I transfer you.

Elaine: (To Jerry) What's going on?

Jerry: She's transferring me!

George and Elaine both throw their hands in the air. A new operator comes on the line.

Operator#2: Yes, how may I assist you?

Jerry: Cancel the automatic callback! That's how you can assist me! It keeps calling and telling me to hang up! I'm going insane!

Operator#2: You need to cancel it yourself. Hang up and then press "*83."

Jerry: That's it?! Thank you!

Jerry hangs up the phone then quickly picks it up and punches the numbers.

Elaine: Is that going to stop it?

George: Let's hope so, huh?

After several seconds, the phone rings.

Jerry: Hello?

Recorded Operator Voice: The circuit was available but it is busy now. Please hang up.

Jerry: (YELLING) Noooo!

Jerry hangs up the phone.

George: I thought you canceled it!

Jerry: So did I!

Elaine: Do it again! Cancel it again!

The phone rings again. Jerry answers it and receives the same recorded message. He hangs up, redials the cancellation numbers, and hangs up again.

Jerry: Well, let's hope it works this time!

The door opens. It is Kramer again.

Kramer: Hey-ya!

Kramer enters. He heads to the refrigerator and takes another three apples. He then heads for the door and sees George and Elaine staring at Jerry, who is dialing a number on the phone.

What's going on here?

George: Jerry's checking some reservations for us.

Jerry, slamming down the phone.

Jerry: It's still busy!

Kramer, exiting the apartment.

Kramer: You know, you really should try that automatic callback.

Fade out.

LINES COMPOSED...

Ted Thompson

"Throw me the line,"
Saith the actor.
"Throw me the line,"
Saith the drowning man.

All search for the missing line.
Unless found,
How to know
If we've stepped over it?

Demarcations are
Text and lifeline,
Indications of bounds
Of the acceptable
Of the pleasurable
Of the real
Of life itself.
But texts and lifelines
Always shift,
Moving as the demarcation
Between past and present.

"Don't give me that line,"
Saith the maiden.
Leaving her mured behind the unseen,
He turned
And made a bee-line
Toward the threshold.
Hesitating a moment,
Wondering *which* threshold,
He finally
Crossed the Rubicon
Of desire.

CIGARETTES

Allison Crowhurst

Dammit! Why do I always believe everything he tells me?

The rain starts to fall gently, making soft patterings on the windshield of the battered old '76 Chevy pick-up truck. The girl lights a cigarette, inhaling the first drag deeply and holding it in. Slowly, she blows the smoke out in little ringlets that drift towards the crack in the window. She drives down the highway, poking along, in no hurry. Three cars pass her.

Good. I hope I'm late picking him up. He deserves to wait as long as I choose for him to. Jackass. He's gonna pull this crap and then expect me to do everything for him.

She looks down at the dusty dash and reads the speedometer. It reads 60 miles per hour. That means that she's only doing 55 because it's broken. The white sign on the side of the road reads SPEED LIMIT *75*.

I should be going faster. Oh, so what? Screw all those other drivers. If they don't like it, then let them pass. Besides, I don't think this old hunk of junk could stay at a steady 75 miles per hour.

DAMN him!!! How could he do this to me? To us? Yeah, he deserves to be picked up late. He deserves to wait around for me for a change.

The driver of the truck looks down to read the clock, forgetting that the old truck doesn't have a working clock. She swears under her breath and checks her wrist. The blonde girl reaches over to turn on the radio, fidgeting with the tune button before finally getting a good reception. As she waits to hear the jockey announce the time, she lights another cigarette.

I gotta quit smoking. These things are getting to be so expensive. Right now, we really don't have the money to support any extras. What the hell? Why am I always the one giving up my money, my pleasures, my time, my life?

The radio announcer pipes up, announcing more severe weather on the way. High winds, thunder and lighting and a possible tornado watch for the rest of the night. "Stay tuned for more information and updates on the storm," he drawls out over the radio waves.

Shit. I hope the weather holds for a while longer. Stay tuned. Why doesn't he just tell me the time already? Stay tuned. I wish Ray would stay tuned to me. Maybe it's my fault, maybe I'm the one who was wrong. Why can't I keep a hold on his attention anymore? Maybe I haven't been doing enough for him. What else can I do, what else can I try?

The girl turns the radio louder as the rain starts to fall a little heavier on the windshield. She exhales cigarette smoke, blowing it towards the crack in the window. As the outside air eats up the smoke, a drop of rain splashes on the lit cigarette causing it to sputter.

Please, oh please, don't go out. You're one of my last cigarettes, and I may not be getting anymore for a while. Oh screw it. I will buy more. It's my money, and I will spend it how I want to.

The radio jockey announces the time: 6:05 p.m.

Oops. Now I'm really going to get it. That makes me twenty minutes late already, and I still have about five more miles to go. Oh, well. I hope he is waiting outside in this icky weather. Serves him right. Maybe it'll wash away some of the scum in him.

The driver turns left onto Main Street. She passes through a small, quiet town. The only thing open is the gas station down the road to the left. Everything else usually closes around five o'clock on Sunday afternoons. She pulls up to a building on the right, covered in green vines that seem to be devouring it. She pulls the old red truck to the curb and looks around. With what little light is left in the day, and the storm rolling in stronger by the second, she scans the area for any signs of life.

Crap. Where is he? That stupid son of a...Wait. Is that him over there? Oh, great. Where is he?

All of a sudden the gas station up the road is blinking its lights on and off.

What in the world? I wonder what could be going on there. Maybe I should drive over and see.

The petite girl puts the big truck into drive and pulls into the parking lot of the gas station. A man walks towards the truck. "Ray!! Oh, good. I'm so glad that you're all right!"

"Where in the hell have you been, Jennie? I was supposed to be picked up over a half-hour ago!! How could you just leave me standing here in the storm?"

"Well, I had things to do. Yeah, and I kind of overlooked the time...and..."

"Save me the BS. Sometimes I really think you don't care about me. After all the things I do for you. You are really so ungrateful."

The couple looks at each other for a minute. One glares at the other and the other cowers in his gaze.

Great. I really pissed him off this time. He's so right. I was very wrong to let him just stand out there in the storm. Who knows what could have happened to him?

The dark man turns on his heel and walks towards the gas station. The girl pulls the truck to a pump and gets out to pump gas. When the meter reads ten dollars, she stops the pump and gets her money to pay. From her wallet, she grabs a lonely twenty-dollar bill and then heads toward the station. Once inside, she goes to the counter to pay, looking forlornly at the cigarettes.

No. I can't waste money on them right now. Oh,well. I get paid in four days. I'll make the last two I have last until then.

The girl starts to pay, and Ray walks up to the counter with a hot dog and soft drink in his hand.

"Put this on the same bill as pump number two. My girlfriend here owes me much more than this for letting me sit in the rain for so long."

Ray walks out of the store toward the pick-up truck. The girl watches him walk away. The fury building in her petite body shows as she clenches her fists, and she turns white.

"I'll take a pack of Newports also."

"I'll take a pack of Newports also."

The sales attendant takes the twenty and hands her back one dollar and fifty-two cents in change and a green and white striped cigarette box.

"Thank you."

Jennie walks out of the gas station to the truck, climbing in on the passenger's side. She shuts the door and rolls down the window a crack. Then she takes her purse and puts the new pack of cigarettes into it and takes out her old pack and a lighter. Ray starts the truck up and drives out onto the road.

"How many times do I have to tell you not to smoke in this truck? You shouldn't smoke at all. Throw that new pack you bought out the window, now."

"What!!??"

"You heard me, throw it out now!!"

"Screw you Ray. This is my truck, and I'll smoke if I want to smoke. You have no say so at all."

The girl lights up a cigarette and blows it out quickly. She doesn't even stop to savor the taste. Her anger is building quickly, and it is showing. Ray rolls his window down all the way.

"The smoke bothers me. Put it out now. Besides I'm getting rained on now."

"Whatever, Ray. Just shut up and eat your hot dog."

The man is shocked by her tone. Suddenly he reaches over and snatches the cigarette from her long, skinny fingers. He throws it out the window.

"There, that's better."

The girl just stares at him with an open mouth. She rolls down her window.

"Jennie, stop being such a child. Roll up the window."

She turns white with fury. The anger turns her eyes a fiery blue. She snatches his hot dog and whips it out the window. The truck comes to a screeching halt. The man turns on her, anger glaring from his brown eyes.

"Get out of the truck and retrieve my hot dog. NOW!"

"Get it yourself."

The pair sit glaring at each other. The woman not backing down to the domineering male next to her. He raises his hand to her, and then drops it as someone behind him beeps.

"We'll take care of this later."

Ray turns the truck around and pulls up to the hot dog. Thunder is beginning to rumble and streaks of white-hot lightning are lacing the sky. He glares at her as he opens the door of the truck and looks for the hot dog. Jennie moves into the driver's seat, locks the doors, and unrolls the window a crack. She lights up a cigarette and inhales it deeply, feeling the smoke move into her lungs and the nicotine through her veins. Ray walks up to the door, hot dog in hand, confused-looking.

"Open this door now, Jennie."

With a cold fire burning deep in her blue eyes, she returns the glare. She takes a drag of the cigarette, and blows it through the crack, toward his face.

"Go to hell, Ray."

With those words, she puts the big truck into drive and peals off into the storm.

HAIKU ON NOTHING (BUT THEN AGAIN, AREN'T THEY ALL?)

Anthony Heintzelman

The wind blows a leaf.
Still five syllables to go.
The leaf gets blown far.

THEM MASON WILLIAMSES

Jed Taylor

How about that Mason Williams,
Ain't he a geek?
Writin' redneck poems,
Pretendin' to be sleek.

Bein' a cheesy meat-head,
He's playin' the fool,
He needs to stop the grab-ass,
An' git that butt in school.

Look at that big ding-dong,
Writin' at his best?
With alcohol and frog guts,
Splattered on his vest.

That hemmin' an' hawin' Williams,
Ain't he a stitch?
Goofin' on all us rednecks –
Sunnuvabitch!

How to be like Mason?
It's easy if you try.
Just kick a dog and bag yer' lunch,
And spit, in good folks' eye.

MOMMY I ONLY ASKED "WHY?"

Katye Novinski

Mommy, why can't I see the sky?
Go to sleep, honey.
Mommy, why can't I see the moon?
Go to bed.

Got to sleep.
Mommy, why won't you answer me?
Go to bed.
Mommy, why won't you look at me?

Mommy, why won't you answer me?
It's past your bedtime.
Mommy, why won't you look at me?
You should be asleep.

It's past your bedtime.
Mommy, why don't you see me?
You should be asleep.
Mommy, why don't you love me?

Mommy, why don't you see me?
I'm going out now.
Mommy, why don't you love me?
I'm going out.

THE PRAYING MANTIS

G. Jeffrey O'Malley

The Praying Mantis thought one day about how absurd it was for there to be a God. The Praying Mantis called out, "Oh, Lord, I must ask you to prove yourself to me. I find you an enchantment and wish you to prove your existence to me."

The Praying Mantis continued to do this every night for a long time. Much to his surprise, one night the Lord responded. "Praying Mantis," he said, "you call to Me every night to prove Myself. And now here I am to quiet your questioning."

But the Mantis was not convinced. The Mantis said, " I have no way of knowing whether this is not simply some trick. Leave me some proof of your existence."

The Lord replied, "If you can not believe on faith alone, then someday I will press the power of My soul upon you."

And the Mantis said, " I want something tangible. Give me a sign."

The Lord said, "Fine. I will leave you a sign."

The next morning, the Praying Mantis awoke to find a large indentation next to his bedside. It was a large man's footprint. The upturning of the earth had left the Praying Mantis with a veritable bounty. He ate the grubs and such that the foot had unearthed.

Yet that night the Lord came to him again and asked, "Did you enjoy My sign?"

The Praying Mantis replied, "I received no sign."

"You did not notice the footprint next to your bed? The one I put there to give you a veritable smorgasbord?" asked God.

"Oh, I have no proof you did that. I would need another sign."

"Very well, but if you can not believe on faith alone, then someday I will press my soul upon you," replied God.

And so the next morning the Mantis got up only to find apples gathered around him. The apple tree had been kicked a good number of times, and the footprint of a man's sole lay in the dirt around the tree. The Mantis ate the apples heartily.

And that night God came and asked, "Did you enjoy My sign?"

And the Mantis replied, "Please. Those apples could have gotten there in any fashion. Make yourself known to me."

And the Lord replied, "Fine. If you can not believe in faith alone, then I will prove myself by pressing my soul upon you."

And the Praying Mantis waited until morning. When he awoke, he found it impossible to move. He had been crushed and the sole of a man's shoe lay across his body.

And God bellowed, "Even God has two sides to His soul."

INAMORATA

Amanda Colby

In bare feet and a long black cloak
With a crimson pout
Her hair slightly matted
Smile heaven like
Ruffled along with jagged hemlines
Are orchids miscellaneously stuffed
The smell of rosemary and tea leaves
Chambering the door
With smudges of ebony on the creases of her eyelids
She's as beautiful to me
As beauty itself
Yet it's not her smile
Her eyes
Or her slender wrists in her red evening gown
Or her bare breasts caressing the black lace
Cappuccino and smoke she fades into
Her nails are chipped
But her fingers are soft and long
Her mouth is running like a toy motor car
But I haven't heard a word she has said
She laughs in a childlike giggle
She twirls her hair in carousal spirals
I say you look wonderful
I mean just the same
Lying there she is something I've never seen before
Dangling her wine glass
Her knees clutching a bottle
Radio playing her favorite song
Kind of sounds like Vilvaldi
Ibsen at her feet
Smoke in her vision stream
Her breaths are the gentlest sighs
A sigh as if she was pleased with such lurid feelings
I touch her as if she was as fragile as sweet stained glass
Like as pure as the glass in all the cathedrals
I've never touched a petal as soft
I say you feel wonderful

I mean just the same
Watching her I feel I've known her for all eternity
I realize I know her not much at all
A mystery she is to me
I've heard her speak, but never heard her voice
I have kissed her many, many times
But until now I never felt her touch me
Looking in her eyes a deep hue
I've seen her perception
But never ever her depth
There's much more to her than I've ever seen
A lady of passion
A lady of love
Her beauty is more beautiful beyond
The beauty I see skin deep
She's as precious as an amulet
I know the feeling with her
Will never come again
She glances down in to my heart
She took a silver ribbon
And lassoes herself inside
I've blinded myself from within
I couldn't see destiny and fate
If it knocked persistently at my wrought iron gate
For I had searched my years for good fortune and love
I was a mere rose picking
When I saw a honey suckle with such sweet syrup
I no longer felt the need for thorns
She had smelt sweeter to me than any other rose
For when she looked
She really saw
For when I spoke
She intently listened
For when she opened her heart
She really did love
For when I held her
I really was close
For Inamorata was filled with good fortune
I knelt down beside her and I begin to hold her within
I said to her that I loved her
And I mean just the same

MAKING LOVE

Dr. Berta Arias

Our bodies as one
for the last time.

Your body in mine,
probing, pushing.
so long together, yet
feeling feelings not known before.

Sweating, gasping,
crying sounds escaped my soul
as your force beat on,
twisting me inside.

Then your body in mine,
your body and mine
clutched nervously at each other for an instant.

You burst out.

A small convulsion, left inside by you,
turned into a wave of ecstasy.

And exhausted,
fulfilled beyond a dream
I glanced at you next to me,
my newborn daughter.

LICK YOUR HAND BEFORE YOU WASH IT

Anna Justyna Strzelczyk

Lick your hand before you wash it.
Save me a dollar after you spend it.
Scrub the floor before you leave mud on it.
Tell me yes before I ask it.
Leave me nothing after I give it.

HOW TO ANSWER YOUR MOTHER WHEN SHE ASKS YOU HOW MUCH YOU LOVE HER

Jacob A. Boyd

Extend your arms,
full length,
out to your sides.
Smile.
Say, "This much."
If that doesn't satisfy her,
well,
she's asking too much.

Wordeater is the biannual literary/arts magazine of Joliet Junior College.

It accepts submissions from current and former students and faculty.

It is looking for original creative work of any kind, including poetry, plays, short fiction, translations, personal or literary essays, interviews, autobiographical prose, photography, and art.

Please submit work to W. Yarrow (English/Foreigh Language Department, mailbox C-1050). Put your name, address, and telephone number on an envelope or separate cover, but not on the work itself. Only artwork/photography will be returned. Please include a SASE.

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Issue No. 107

The John Stobart Award for Prose: Candy Perry for "Spam"
The John Stobart Award for Poetry: Amanda Colby for "Inamorata"
The John Stobart Award for Visual Arts: Michael Fletcher for front cover.

*John Stobart was the founder and guiding light of **Wordeater**. As faculty sponsor, he shepherded it through 106 issues. He retired from Joliet Junior College's English/Foreign Language Department in 1999.